

Bears of Yosemite (1943) by M. E. Beatty

M. E. Beatty
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About the Author

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r r Ed Beatty, 1933 r
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r Matthew Edward "Ed" Beatty was born August 30, 1901. r He was Associate Park Naturalist in Yosemite from 1932 to 1944. r In 1944 he transferred to Glacier National Park in Montana, r where he was Chief Naturalist to 1955. r He was Regional Chief of Interpretation in 1961. r Ed Beatty wrote several articles and booklets for *Yosemite Nature Notes*, while he was in Yosemite, r including this one. r Other subjects he wrote about included birds, bears, firefall, and photographer C. E. Watkins. r M. E. Beatty died October 22, 1989 at Polson, Montana (which is on the shore of Flathead Lake, south of Glacier National Park). r

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Bibliographical Information

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r M. E. Beatty (Matthew Edward) (1901-1989), r *Bears of Yosemite* (Yosemite: Yosemite Natural History Association, 1943). r 17 pages. Illustrated. 23 cm. r Saddle stitched tan paper cover. r Originally published as *Yosemite Nature Notes* 22(1):1-17 (January 1943). r

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Yosemite Nature Notes

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r THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DEPARTMENT
r AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATIONr

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r Bears of Yosemite

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r r **By M. E. Beatty** r

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r Of all the wild animals in our national parks, the bear undoubtedly ranks first in public interest. There is something so human in the animal that its droll antics are doubly appealing to man. Even its apparent laziness is amusing, and the playfulness of bear cubs is a never-ending source of delight.

r r

r Two types of bears are found within the borders of the United States proper: viz., the grizzly and the black bear. The grizzly is now quite restricted in range, and may best be seen in Yellowstone National Park and sparingly in Glacier National Park. The California Grizzly is now believed to be extinct, but as they were once fairly common in the Yosemite region, no account of the bears of Yosemite would be complete without some mention of them.

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Bears of Yosemite (1943) by M. E. Beatty

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THE CALIFORNIA GRIZZLY

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r Unfortunately, the grizzly bear disappeared from the Californian scene before zoologists had a fair chance to study its movements, habits, and traits while it was actually alive. Only a few complete specimens are preserved in our museums, so complete information is lacking. Evidence indicates, however, that some seven different kinds (subspecies) of grizzlies once existed in California, one of which at least, was native to the Yosemite area.

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r The name “Yosemite” was derived from the Miwok Indian word meaning full-grown grizzly bear, although the Indians knew Yosemite Valley as Ahwahnee (deep-grassy place). [Editor’s note: For the correct meaning and origin of the words *Yosemite* (“they are killers”) and *Ahwahnee* (“(gaping) bear’s mouth”) see [“Origin of the Word Yosemite.”—DEA.](#)] It is interesting to note that the Indians of Yosemite were divided into two moieties or divisions: the land side and the water side. The coyote was the deity heading the water side, while the grizzly headed the land side. Some authorities believe that the name of the grizzly bear group (Yosemites) later came to be applied to all of the Indians living in Ahwahnee rather than to just those of the grizzly bear group.

r r

r Numerous written accounts of encounters with grizzlies in the Yosemite region are on record, one of the earliest being that of James Capen Adams, better known as “Grizzly Adams,” who captured and trained grizzly bear cubs for his travelling animal show. Adams visited Yosemite in the spring of 1854, and according to his diary, discovered a grizzly bear on the “headwaters of the Merced River.” After killing the mother, he found two very young male cubs in the den, one of which grew up to be the famous “Ben Franklin” of Adams’ animal show. Other grizzlies were captured alive by Adams along the Merced River below Yosemite, and sold at good prices (“Adventures of James Capen Adams,” pp. 191-197).

r r

r The last grizzly known to have been killed in Yosemite was shot “about 1895” at Crescent Lake, east of Wawona, and the skin of this bear is now in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California (“[Animal Life in the Yosemite](#),” p. 70). The last authentic record of the killing of a grizzly bear for the State of California was in August 1922, at Horse Corral Meadows, Tulare County (“[Fur-bearing Mammals of California](#),” pp. 93-94).

r r

r The grizzly differs from the black bear both in structure and habits. In general, grizzly bears are larger

r
r **Indiscriminate Hunting Exterminated the Grizzly in Californiar** r

r r r r than black bears, although size isr not a distinguishing factor in view ofr age variation. The weight of somer grizzlies has been estimated at asr much as 2,000 pounds, but most authorities give 1,200 pounds as ther maximum weight of a Californiar Grizzly. It is believed that the Yosemite subspecies was one of ther smaller of the California Grizzlies.r r

r The external outlines of the maturer grizzly differ from the adult blackr bear in being higher in the shoulder region, giving the appearancer of a hump behind the neck. Ther most reliable field distinguishing feature of the grizzly, however, is ther length of the front claws, those ofr r the grizzly averaging 3 or morer inches as compared with 2 inchesr for a large black bear. In additionr to being nearly 50 per cent longer,r the claws of the grizzly are lessr curved making it difficult for ther adult animal to climb trees.r

r r

r California is well-known as ther Grizzly Bear State, and the emblemr of the grizzly is emblazoned on bothr the State flag and State seal. It isr unfortunate that they can no longerr be looked on as a part of our livingr wildlife, and must be rememberedr as among those many species ofr wild animals in California for whichr conservation came too late.r

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r http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/bears/california_grizzly.html

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SIERRA NEVADA BLACK BEAR (*Ursus americanus californiensis* J. Miller)

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r The bears now found in Yosemite National Park are a subspecies of the American Black Bear, which ranges in forested areas from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from northern Canada southward into Sonora, Mexico.

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Color

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r The black bear has several color phases, ranging from coal black to light brown or cinnamon. This has led to the erroneous belief that the various color phases represent different species. Black phase females often produce brown cubs, or one black and one brown cub, and brown colored females do likewise. In Yosemite, the brown color phase seemingly predominates, as borne out by an accurate check of the bear population in the vicinity of Glacier Point during the summer of 1939.

r r r Here a total of 28 individual bears were identified during the summer, 18 of which exhibited the brown color phase (Yosemite Nature Notes August 1942).

r A similar count made by Joseph Dixon, Field Naturalist, Fish and Wildlife Service, in Yosemite Valley on October 30, 1929, at the old feeding pits, showed that out of a total of twenty-one, 17 were brown and only 4 black (Fur-bearing Mammals of California, p. 103).

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Range and Number

r

r The black bear normally ranges in the Transition and Canadian life zones in Yosemite, which includes elevations from 3,000 to 8,000 feet. Occasional records as low as 2,000 feet and as high as 9,000 feet have been made within the park, but these are probably extremes.

r r

r The density of the bear population in the park varies widely from place to place. Total estimates for the entire 1,189 square miles embracing Yosemite National Park vary between 300 and 400 bears. These figures have been determined by an annual wildlife census taken by patrolling rangers throughout the park.

r r

r During the past ten years the heaviest bear concentration has been in Yosemite Valley. This was mainly the result of "bear show" feeding, which was discontinued in 1940. Before that year, it was not unusual for 40 or more bears to put in appearance at the feeding area to enjoy their garbage "banquet." It would be safe to say that between 1930-1940, as many as 60 bears summered in Yosemite Valley, where under primitive conditions, the area would hardly be large enough to support over three or four individuals.

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Size and Life Span

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r Little is known about the length of life of black bears in the wild, due to the habit of sick or injured bears crawling away to some secluded spot where their carcasses are seldom found by humans. In captivity, bears often live 25 years or more, but in the wild they would probably average much less—possibly between 15 and 20 years. According to old time rangers, individual bears in Yosemite are known to have appeared for 15 successive years, so the ages mentioned are not far amiss.

r r

r A bear is considered mature at the age of 3 or 4 years, when most females have their first young. Full growth is not attained, however, until the sixth or seventh year, when they gain their greatest weight. According to Dixon "an average adult black bear in good flesh will, we have concluded, weigh between 200 and 300 pounds. Large-sized male bears may weigh as much as 500 pounds when fat (Fur-bearing Mammals of California, p. 101).

r r

r The writer has had several opportunities since the publication of the above book to assist in weighing trapped "garbage fed" bears in Yosemite that greatly exceeded the 500 pound maximum recorded by Dixon. The trapping alive of park bears is sometimes resorted to in the public campgrounds and other areas where bears are prone to raid food supplies. This is accomplished in a humane manner through the use of a

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large, galvanized iron cylinder mounted on trailer wheels. The cylinder is equipped with a trap door on one end, and the bear is enticed into the trap by a meat bait. Touching the bait causes the trap door to drop and the bear becomes a prisoner. The trailer can then be coupled to a government car, and transported to a more remote spot where the bear is released.

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On September 28, 1938, a larger male bear (brown color phase) was captured in the above manner. Due to his large size, it was considered worthwhile to secure an accurate record of his weight before release. The trailer containing the bear was backed onto the government platform scales by Wildlife Ranger Ottor Brown. The results were so astounding that the writer was called in to verify the findings. After properly balancing the scales, the combined weight of the trailer and bear was 1,670 pounds. After releasing the bear, the empty trailer alone weighed 990 pounds. The bear was thus found to weigh 680 pounds which, according to all available data, is a record for the Californian Black Bear and subspecies. This unusual weight record can be attributed in part to the artificial feeding of bears carried on between 1930 and 1940, and is undoubtedly more than could be expected for bears eating natural food only (Yosemite Nature Notes, November 1938).

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Hibernation

r r

The expression "as hungry as a bear" is particularly true in later summer and fall when bears eat, not only to take care of their immediate daily needs, but to build up heavy layers of fat necessary to carry them through their winter "sleep." With the coming of the first heavy storm of winter (usually in December or early January) most bears go into hibernation. The den is usually a warm and sheltered cave among the rocks, or a hollow tree, fairly high on the talus slopes surrounding Yosemite Valley or above the rim. Here they remain until later March or early April, depending on the severity of the winter. They hibernate singly except where cubs may occupy the den with the mother the winter following their birth.

r r

As a rule, bears partake of no food or water during the hibernation period, depending on the breaking down of the fatty tissues built up during the previous fall to sustain life; however, they have occasionally been observed outside their dens during mild winters. From a study of the tracks of such individuals, it

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appeared that they were out simply for exercise between storms. By following their tracks it was possible to locate a number of bear dens which otherwise would never have been found without the use of dogs.

r r

During January 1932, bear tracks were reported by local skiers on the slopes of Mt. Watkins at elevations between 7000 and 8000 feet. On March 3, former Park Naturalist Bertr Harwell and Park Photographer Ralph Anderson succeeded in locating one of the dens, and obtained proof that it was occupied by a hibernating bear.

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r **Bear Den on Mt. Watkins** r

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The den was located in a living White Fir, 5 ft. in diameter, and was reached through a vertical hole in the 4 feet deep snow, at the bottom of which was a horizontal tunnel about 18 inches in diameter which ran into the opening at the tree base. After setting up both still and

r **Close-up of Den** r

r r r movie cameras, every effort was made to get the bear to leave the den, but to no avail. As a last resort it was decided to try a flashbulb picture of the interior by lowering the camera down to the horizontal tunnel. In order to level out a placar for the camera, Ralph Anderson cautiously reached way down in the vertical opening to remove several uneven blocks of snow. As his hand neared the entrance to the den, a paw reached out with lightning speed so characteristic of a bear, and Ralph came up holding a bloody hand. r r

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Picture taking was forgotten and all haste was made to get Ralph to the hospital for proper treatment. The scar on Ralph's hand even after ten years gives positive evidence that the den was truly occupied by a hibernating bear. It is also another indication that bears at this latitude do not enter a state of coma but on the contrary may sleep rather lightly (Yosemite Nature Notes, April 1933).

r r

It has been generally supposed that the habit of hibernation in black bears was to enable them to escape the cold weather of the winter months. Observations in Yosemite would indicate, however, that the availability of food during this period is the chief controlling factor. This was well illustrated during the winter of 1936-1937, when at least a half dozen bears were observed on the valley floor all winter. They were seen most often around the incinerator where scraps of food could be had. The first snow storm of the season on the valley floor occurred December 26. That month 53 inches of snow fell; January added 78 1/2 inches; February 9 1/2 inches, and March 10 1/2 inches, making a total of 151 1/2 inches of snow for the floor of the valley. This was an unusually heavy precipitation. Coupled with this, temperatures reached their lowest level ever recorded for the valley.

r r

On February 18, 1937, Bert Harwell, then park naturalist, and I found a fresh set of tracks leading up Indian Canyon which we followed in hopes of finding a den. We soon found many other tracks and evidence of bear activity recorded on both snow and trees. Some 400 feet above the valley our set of tracks disappeared into a hole among the rocks, and freshly cut twigs of mistletoe were everywhere abundant.

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Being the junior member of the

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Bear Photographed in Den—Indian Canyon

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team, I was elected to explore the den. Crawling on all fours, I managed to wiggle into the opening of the den, and as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I found myself face to face with a bear. Fortunately for me, it was a small timid bear, and the cave chamber was large enough to permit the bear to retreat to the far edge of the room instead of rushing me at the entrance. After hurriedly backing out, a council of war was held, and Bert went back for flashlights and cameras, while I endeavored to keep the bear from coming out of the den. After considerable maneuvering, we succeeded in taking a flashbulb photo

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showing a wild bear in its natural den, a picture of which is reproduced in this publication. Such opportunities for photography are rare, and not always accomplished with the luck and lack of injury that we experienced (Yosemite Nature Notes, April 1937).

Cubs

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r Although breeding data for the black bears in Yosemite are few, it is believed that late June is the time when most of them mate. With a gestation period of approximately 7 1/2 months, this means that cubs are, for the most part, born around the latter part of January, or early February, while the mother is in hibernation.

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r Cubs are generally born in pairs, although triplets or even solitary

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r The Glacier Point Quadruplets

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r r r r cubs are not uncommon. On rarer occasions, as many as four cubs will comprise the litter. The only record for bear quadruplets in Yosemite was in the summer of 1939, when a large brown female appeared with two brown and two black cubs in the vicinity of Glacier Point (Yosemite Nature Notes, October 1939).

r Cubs at birth are extremely tiny, probably weighing less than a pound each. Their growth and development are at first unusually slow. In one case where a cub was born to a mother in captivity, it was 39 days before the cub opened its eyes (Fur-bearing Mammals of California, p. 125). The nursing period lasts for about six months, but the cubs will travel with the mother their first year, usually hibernating the next winter in the same den with the mother, or in a den nearby.

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r In Yosemite, new born cubs seldom emerge from the den with their mothers until late April, and are rarely observed on the valley floor before May or June. At this time they are about 14 inches long, stand a foot

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high, and weigh in their neighborhood of 10 or 12 pounds. They soon learn to supplement their milk diet with other food, and put on weight rapidly. On November 20, 1935, we had an opportunity to weigh a pair of cubs who were approximately 10 months old, and found the female to weigh 80 pounds and the male 120 pounds. No explanation accounting for their difference in weight can be advanced except the difference in sex (Yosemite Nature Notes, April 1936).

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r Cub at Six Months

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The mother bear is usually quite solicitous about the well being of her cubs, fondling and playing with them, and protecting them when in danger. They very soon learn to scramble up the nearest tree at their first warning sound from the mother. A mother has been observed spanking and soundly cuffing her cubs because they did not go up a tree quickly enough after she had given them a warning of danger.

r r

In spite of maternal care, however, as the cubs grow in size they usually dwindle in number. Sickness and accidents take their toll, although the death rate is surprisingly low considering the number of rapidly moving automobiles they have to dodge. The male bear would try to kill or injure any cub that comes within his reach, including his own offspring. One cub was sideswiped by a male's paw as it was belatedly trying to scramble up a tree trunk to safety, and suffered an injured hip as a result. It was possibly this same cub that later furnished an interesting incident for a group of people assembled around a mother bear and her three cubs on July 4, 1933, in the lower end of Yosemite Valley.

r r

The mother bear did not seem to mind the attention of the crowd other than to show her disapproval by growling and smacking her lips when various individuals came too close in order to get pictures. She finally got the cubs away from the crowd by wading out into the Merced River where she sat down with the water up to her neck, and proceeded to give the cubs a bath. When this was over, they returned to the bank to be further annoyed by the interested spectators. At last in disgust, she went down to the river again, and swam to the other side. The little lame cub she carried on her back. It appeared, as she swam away, that the cub was hanging on the hair at the back of her neck. The other two cubs swam without difficulty, one on each side of the mother, keeping close to her until the far bank was reached. Upon landing, they all shook themselves like dogs, and shuffled up the steep bank, disappearing among the trees beyond (Yosemite

Nature Notes, September 1933).r

r r

r The adult female normally produces a litter only every other year. r r Cubs hibernating with the mother the winter after their birth will generally be turned loose to shift forr themselves during their second summer when the mother again prepares to mate. r

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Food

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r Although classed as carnivoresr (flesh eaters), vegetable matterr forms a large portion of the diet ofr bears. They have been observed to eat “almost everything” containinr any sort of nutriment, and are stillr nearly always hungry. r

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r After first emerging from hibernation, r adult bears eat sparingly, r seemingly preferring grass and otherr herbage for a two or three weeks’r period. This is believed to tone upr the system and to get the digestiver organs back to normal functioninr after their lack of use durinr hibernation. r

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r r r "Billy" the black bear sets a record
r by eating 72 pancakes r
r (dramatization; photo not in original book)r r

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r r

r As the season progresses, their appetites increase, and they have been observed feeding on a wider variety of material. In Yosemite, these include ants and other insects, honey and young from wild bee's and yellow jackets' nests, manzanita and coffee berries, apples (from the orchards planted by the early settlers), pine nuts, acorns, clover, grass, roots, fish, rodents, carrion, and around human habitations, camp refuse and garbage. In addition to the above, they show a decided liking for most types of food used by humans, as is attested by their raids on campers' food supplies. In an effort to determine the capacity of a bear for human food, the cooks at the government mess in July, 1929, served a special breakfast for Billy, a big, amiable black bear, who was the camp pet. Hot cakes swimming in syrup came in a steady stream from the kitchen stove to the back door where Billy was waiting. After the food supplies, the cooks, and even the bear were exhausted, a final check showed that Billy had consumed seventy-two flapjacks. At the finish he was seated on the ground, groaning and fairly gasping for breath, probably indicating a feeling of both pleasure and pain (r Yosemite Nature Notes, October 1929).r This interesting eating exhibition shows the remarkable ability of the black bear to adapt himself to the presence of man.

r r

r At times this tendency to utilize man's food involves the bear in amazing predicaments. For example, in April 1942, a yearling cub in the endeavor to reach a few drops of milk, thrust its head into the narrow bottle-neck top of a 5-gallon milk can, and was then unable to remove it. The cub ran around blindly, bumping trees and rocks, presenting a ludicrous picture to onlookers, who hastily gathered. Several attempts were made to extricate the bear's head from the can by means of ropes and tackle but to no avail. Finally it was necessary to rope down each leg and to cut open the top of the milk can by means of a cold chisel. The bear, after finally being released, hastily disappeared up the talus slope with a sore head and neck, but with a well learned lesson of what not to do (Yosemite Nature Notes, June 1942).r

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r Got a Can Opener?r

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r r r

r The black bear has often been accused of being a stock killer butr such cases are extremely rare, andr the exception rather than the rule.r Jay Bruce, the State lion hunter,r says, “In every instance that I haver personally investigated where bearr has been accused of killing stock, ir have found the slayer to be a lion,r except in a few cases where coyotesr were responsible. In fact, I haver never known a bear to actually killr any large animal, either wild or domestic.”r

r r

r Mr. Bruce further states, “I do notr r r r believe that he (the black bear) canr be considered a menace to stock orr game, but that he has been wronglry accused on general appearancesr for the damage done by mountainr lions and coyotes, and that the complaints are largely made by peoplerr who had no reliable method of investigating the circumstances, orr had neglected to do so, assuminrr that bear signs around the carcassr of stock were conclusive evidencer that the bears were responsible forr the loss of stock.” (Fur-bearingr Mammals of California, p. 133.)r

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r r r

r r The largest animal killed and eaten by bears in Yosemite is the occasional new-born fawn accidentally encountered by the bear. Fawns at birth and for a few days thereafter are scentless, making it impossible for predators to track them by sense of smell. Several cases are known in Yosemite of bears stumbling on to fawns hidden in the tall grass of our meadows, which then, due to their inability to run, fall ready victims.

r However, this represents a small minority of the total fawn population as less than ten such cases have been recorded in Yosemite Nature Notes during its twenty years of publication.

r r

Habits and Mannerisms

r r

r Although essentially nocturnal by nature, some of the bears in Yosemite are active throughout the day. As one visitor expressed it, "With the arrival of the summer visitors, your bears apparently go on a 24-hour shift."

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r During the warmer parts of the day, the majority of bears will bed down in a litter of pine needles in some secluded spot from which they can quietly slip away if disturbed. Other beds are simply scratched out hollows less than a foot deep.

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Bears occasionally sleep in trees: particularly on large horizontal limbs where they can easily stretch out. They are good tree climbers, and can seemingly climb both larger and small trees with equal ease, their main requirement being a tree of sufficient size to support the bear's weight. The writer once had occasion to watch a bear climb high enough in a young sapling that the tree top bent over far enough to nearly touch the ground. The bear would alternately back down and climb a step and thus simulate the action of a child's teeter-totter. This plaything so intrigued another bear nearby that it too joined the bear in the sapling with the result that the tree broke throwing them both to the ground.

Some writers have referred to the black bear as the "playboy of the woods," and anyone watching their actions over a period of time will have ample opportunity to understand why. They love to wrestle and play, and even their wanderings in search for food will result in amazing situations.

Bears habitually follow a given route, stepping each time in the footsteps previously made. Several such trails have been found in Yosemite where they have stepped in the same tracks as their predecessors, until a series of alternating depressions have developed nearly 6 inches in depth. One of these trails may be found in the wooded area between Camp Curry and Happy Isles.

Other signs left by bears besides footprints, consist of bear wallows, rotten logs and stumps ripped apart by bears in their search for insects, turned-over rocks, feces, and bear trees.

These bear trees are of particular interest to the park visitors, particularly when the trees happen to be Quaking Aspen, for they permanently record the marks left by the bears. Incense Cedars, Ponderosa Pines and occasionally Lodgepole Pines are also used as "bear sign posts." Arriving at such a tree, the bear usually stops and, standing erect on its hind legs, reaches up as high as possible, biting and scratching the tree. The reason for this action is not definitely known, although many writers have suggested that it may be some type of "social register."

The black bear, being the largest mammal in the park, has practically no natural enemies. The largest bear is generally the boss of his domain until a still larger one comes along to replace him. Females with cubs will sometimes stand against a larger bear, but as a rule the smaller bear gives ground without engaging in any serious battle. Probably of all the mammals, the bear has the greatest respect for the skunk. On many occasions, our naturalists have observed skunks repeatedly refuse to be outbluffed by a bear (see Yosemite Nature Notes). Generally, the bear gives away after a few half-hearted attempts to frighten away the skunk, and allows the skunk to take over the remains of its unfinished meal. Very rarely the bear goes so far in its bluffing as to learn first hand what a formidable weapon the skunk possesses. It would be interesting to know whether the obvious caution exercised by bears toward skunks is inspired by actual experience of the skunk's scent, or by some innate sense of caution acquired from the mother in early cubhood.

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THE PRESENT BEAR POLICY AND ITS PROBLEMS

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r Some twenty years ago visitors to Yosemite Valley considered themselves fortunate to get even a fleeting glimpse of a bear, and they would commonly arouse all their neighbors so that they too might enjoy the experience.

r r

r With the gradual increase in human visitors came a corresponding increase in the number of bears attracted by the campers' foodstuffs and by enlarged garbage pits. Soon bears started raiding camps for food, and after many visitor complaints, the National Park Service began a bear feeding program, the food consisting mainly of garbage scraps. The feeding area was located as far down valley as possible in order to protect the campers and lodge guests in the upper end of the valley. The result was that bears would remain throughout the day in the vicinity of the feeding pits which, due to the geography of the valley area, could not be located any great distance away from the main highways. The bears soon

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r r r r r turned beggars, stopping cars, and lining the roadside in hopes of receiving some tid-bits.

r To the visitor, the situation seemed ideal. Here was a chance to see bears and to feed them. Few appreciated that these bears were actually wild animals, with the ability to inflict serious damage to those

Bears of Yosemite (1943) by M. E. Beatty

coming too close to them. Consequently, accidents became more frequent until finally more than sixty hospital cases were recorded during one season. The late Will Rogers after a visit to Yosemite remarked, "They warn you not to feed the bears, but they have a hospital for those that do."

r r

The Service, in an attempt to reduce the number of accidents and to restore normal conditions then issued a new regulation prohibiting the visitor from feeding, teasing, or molesting the bears. Even this failed entirely to solve the problem.

r r

From the biological standpoint, nature was badly out of balance. The bears were no longer accustomed to shifting for themselves. The valley area was far too small to supply sufficient natural food for such a large bear population, and so the animals continued to raid camps and garbage cans and to hold up cars. Accidents from bear injuries were still too high.

r r

The policy under which our parks operate in respect to wildlife is to keep conditions as nearly natural as possible. The artificial feeding of bears was therefore not the solution to the problem.

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"Bear show" feeding in Yosemite Valley was discontinued in September 1940, and some of the excess bear population was removed in order to effect more natural conditions. A total of 45 bears were trapped during the fall, and moved to outlying areas above the valley rim. This still left too many bears for an area that would hardly supply normal food for more than three or four individuals. So in 1941 and 1942, additional bears were removed; particularly, those individuals that insisted on begging food along highways or were confirmed raiders of camps.

r r

Results in general have proven most encouraging, and accidents from bears have dropped to only a few cases a season. Many of the bears now seek natural food, and a more nearly natural balance has been established. It is hoped that through a close adherence to this policy, the bear situation will continue to show a steady improvement.

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Where To See Bears

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With the removal of the surplus bear population from the valley, visitors commonly ask, "Where are the bears? And where can we go to see them?" This is a most difficult question to answer as bears seldom remain at one fixed spot for any great length of time.

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r They are often encountered unexpectedly along the roads and trails,r in the old apple orchards, or in their
campgrounds. Bears on trails faithfully follow every zig and zag, and the hiker had best step off the trail,r r r
r and give up the right-of-way unless he wishes to outbluff the bear.r Campers usually have no difficulty
seeing bears, particularly, if they have such odorous foods as ham or bacon in their larders. Bears show a
decided preference for salty and greasy foods, and for any kind of sweets, which their keen sense of smell
enables them to easily locate.r Foodstuffs should, therefore, be protected by caching in a box or sack and
suspending with a rope between two trees, or from a horizontal limb. Caution should be observed to make
sure the food supply is high enough above the ground so that a bear will be unable to reach it, and far
enough away from the tree trunk that the bear can't reach it by climbing. It is certainly not advisable to
place your slab of bacon under the mattress of a cot, as one lady visitor is reported to have done. Needless
to say, she was rudely rolled off her cot by a bear during the middle of the night, and suffered both a loss
of dignity and a slab of bacon.r Bears may break into cars in search of food they can smell.r

r r

r Raiding bears can usually be frightened away by loud noises and flashlight beams. They will not
intentionally attack a human unless both happen to be on opposite ends of a slab of bacon. It should be
remembered that a bear can both outrun and outclimb a human, and that loss of food is preferable to
serious injuries that might be sustained through too close proximity.r

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r With the discontinuance of "bear shows" and the removal of a larger number of bears from the valley floor,
visitors will undoubtedly have more difficulty in seeing bears. At times, it is possible for the rangers and
naturalists to advise visitors as to location where bears have been recently observed. It is believed that the
visitor will get a far greater thrill out of seeing a bear in natural surroundings than in seeing dozens of bears
feeding on garbage under artificial surroundings.r

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- [r r \[Current NPS bear management practices and visitor recommendations\]](#)r

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About the Author

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r r Ed Beatty, 1933 r
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r Matthew Edward "Ed" Beatty was born August 30, 1901. r He was Associate Park Naturalist in Yosemite from 1932 to 1944. r In 1944 he transferred to Glacier National Park in Montana, r where he was Chief Naturalist to 1955. r He was Regional Chief of Interpretation in 1961. r Ed Beatty wrote several articles and booklets for *Yosemite Nature Notes*, while he was in Yosemite, r including this one. r Other subjects he wrote about included birds, bears, firefall, and photographer C. E. Watkins. r M. E. Beatty died October 22, 1989 at Polson, Montana (which is on the shore of Flathead Lake, south of Glacier National Park). r

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